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Scottish Bird News

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No 90 Dec. 2008

The bird archaeology of a small island

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Approaching the May - today's visitor or early pilgrim? *Lang Stewart*

Birdwatching visitors to the Isle of May will be aware of the historical interests of the island, greeted as they come ashore at Kirkhaven by sight of the remains of a monastic community. What interest of past visitors to the monastery might there have been in the birds? Archaeological excavations carried out over five years during the 1990s by GUARD (Glasgow University Archaeological Research Department) provide us with some hints.

As the Bird Observatory approaches its 75th anniversary in the autumn of 2009, the oldest extant observatory in the UK, we can be confident that birds have been a feature of attention over a period of some 4,000 years of human occupation. There are no bird remains recovered in association with this early history, but surely one of the attractions of the May to our earliest antecedents will have been the breeding seabird communities? The focus of the archaeologists spans 1500 hundred years, over three periods: Period I, the 5th to 12th centuries CE; Period II, between the 13th and 15th; and, Period III covering the 16th to 19th centuries. A total of 26 bird species has been identified across these three Periods, with remains emerging from middens, pointing perhaps to a culinary interest, reinforced by the presence of butchery marks on a number of the bones.

No surprise that many of the species represented are of seabirds. They are what we would expect to have been present at particular times of the year, and their bones are of a size to aid preservation over long periods of time. Whilst current birder spring and autumn visitors to the island could feed well, had they a mind to, on the migrants that can at times be present in their thousands, so too presumably could the earliest human residents and visitors, the monks and pilgrims from pre-Reformation times, and the subsequent villagers and lighthouse keepers of more recent centuries. However insubstantial passerine bones are those least likely to be preserved, and we have only a Blackbird and a thrush sp, a Raven and a Jackdaw from Period III, to point to the presence of particular members of this group, along with unidentified remains.

Whether seabird species identified are of island breeding birds, or those that bred elsewhere we cannot be sure, but it seems likely that some at least will have been birds that nested on the May. Adult and young Gannets, and adult Cormorants and Shags have been identified from each of the Periods, as have the young of either (or both) Cormorants or Shags... these species

SHOUT
SHARE
IT
WAKE

Tasty Puffins of yesteryear - now here in a modern setting *Lang Stewart*

are difficult to tell apart at that stage. Shags of course breed in good numbers currently, and both Gannet and Cormorant are known to have done so in the 19th Century. Why bring in birds from elsewhere if they were available locally? Gulls too are present from all of the Periods, and as both adults and young: Herring/Lesser Black-backed, Great Black-backed and Kittiwake, and all are birds breeding in the 20th Century. The presence of adult Black headed Gull remains from Periods II and III is intriguing, as this is a species that would at present be regarded as pretty unusual on the island, although not infrequently seen off shore.

Auks too, it will be no surprise, are a feature of all three of the Periods, with both adult and immature Guillemot and Razorbill remains identified in each. The Puffin, now such a ubiquitous breeding bird of the May, was until the 1950s present in only limited numbers, and this might be reflected in its remains being identified only from Periods II and III. The single Black Guillemot record is from Period III, and it is interesting to note that whilst this is today quite a rare bird on the island, not even recorded annually, they were breeders in small numbers in the 19th Century.

Perhaps the species that will create greatest interest, given their legendary status with the dubious distinction of extinction, is the Great Auk. A species that can be claimed by only one other British Bird Observatory for their status list (Fair Isle), this bird is identified on the May from the bones of no less than five individuals, and is present in each of the three Periods, so spanning over a millennium. Whilst the May does certainly share some of the geographical and topological features of known nesting sites in the Northern Isles, we cannot assume that it bred here, tempting or even likely as this might seem. The remains here (as with the other species) have been recovered in the context of middens, with an obvious association with cooking, and it is well recorded that Great Auks were carried by sailors as a food supply around the coasts....the 'takeaway meal' of their day!

The presence of ducks and geese in the archaeological record is interesting. Eider and Shelduck may not seem surprising, as both are present in numbers today, though it should be remembered that the former in earlier centuries had a much more limited British breeding range, and is not recognised as a good species to eat. Mallard is, of course, and is a regular species on the island, but with only two breeding records. What is more puzzling are the records for Shoveler and Tufted Duck/Scaup (not distinguishable), with neither recorded annually in recent times (although long term members of the SOC will be familiar with the previously massive flocks of Scaup further up the Forth). Domestic/Greylag Geese (again cannot be distinguished) have been identified in each Period, and there is a single record of Pink-footed or Bean Goose from Period III. One of the intriguing questions, to which we will probably never know the full answer, is how were the birds that have been discovered in the archaeological remains taken in the first place? Nesting birds, and those that might feed or land on the island we can more readily understand, but how about those that we now only see in passing off shore? Was their status different? Were there capture techniques we are no longer aware of? Were birds brought onto the island?

Wading birds are now very much a feature of island life (over 30 species recorded from the island, perhaps up to twenty in most years), and are also a traditional quarry species, and with many of them larger and more robust birds, it is interesting that although wader sp remains are associated with each Period, only Curlew has been specifically identified, from Period III. Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon is to be expected, and has been identified in all Periods, although the single Buzzard from Period III is something of an oddity....perhaps a migrant that came to grief? The sparsity of passerine records was noted above, with the single Jackdaw and Raven records seeming appropriate in the context of middens.

With 26 species recognised spanning a thousand years of archaeological remains, we have only a glimpse of the past birdlife of an island so well studied over the past 100 years. What has been identified raises opportunity for discussion on why some of the less obvious species, and why some that might have been expected do not occur.

I am especially grateful to archaeologist Catherine Smith of SUAT, who worked on the bird remains, for her skills in identification and subsequent discussion on the status of the birds.

Mike Martin

Scottish Bird News
No 90 Dec. 2008

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 7th February 2009 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC,**
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Waterston House,
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Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

New SOC Members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire** Mr D Reardon, **Borders** Mr & Mrs B Goodburn, **Central Scotland** Mr K Findlater, Mr M Learmonth, Mr & Mrs B Ruddell ,**Clyde** Mr J Edge, Mr A Geary, Mr T James, Mr G Scott, Miss L Turner, **Dumfries** Mr A Black, **England, Wales & NI** Mr J Babb, Mr & Mrs H Embleton, **Grampian** Rev W M Campbell, **Highland** Mr & Mrs A Denison, Mr & Mrs A Ferguson, **Lothian** Ms R Anderson, Mr & Mrs F Baxter, Mr D Brown, Mr & Mrs G Dobson, Mr D Lang, Dr R McEwing, Ms E Michie, Mr R Morgan, Dr P WH Rae, Mr J Reynolds, Mr & Mrs H Turner, Mr N Warren, Miss M Woodward, **Orkney** Mr D Wakefield.

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are; **August: 1st** £30 S F Jackson, **2nd** £20 Prof P Vandome, **3rd** £10 Miss N Henderson. **September: 1st** £30 Mrs H Merrie, **2nd** £20 Mr & Mrs Betts, **3rd** £10 Mrs H M Thomson. **October: 1st** £150 Miss M McCulloch, **2nd** £75 Mrs Mary Stewart, **3rd** £50 A Shepherd, **4th** £30 Mrs Karen Miller, **5th** £20 Dr D M Shepherd, **6th** £10 Mrs M Gregory.

New members are always welcome. Must be over 18 and Club members. Please contact: Daphne Peirse-Duncombe, Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

Do you want to help the SOC?

The SOC is your club; its success depends on the contribution from members. This short feature will, over successive issues, highlight some of the ways you can help. If you wish any further information please contact Wendy Hicks at Waterston House.

- **Gift Aid**
- **Remembering the SOC in your Will**
- **Gifting old bird books**: *the SOC has one of the best libraries of bird books in Britain and is always willing to receive any of your old bird books; duplicate volumes are sold in aid of Club funds at Waterston House*
- **Attract/invite new members to join**
- **Getting involved in surveys**
- **Assisting in branch activities**
- **Contributing articles for publication**

The *BS3* Fund

The Birds of Scotland has been a great success for the SOC, being awarded the Neill medal by the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Silver Medal of the Zoological Society of London. With over 80% of the stock now sold it has also been a great financial success with a surplus of over £50,000 already achieved.

Both SOC Council and the Editors of BS3 wished this success to be a springboard for future successes and have agreed that the profits from *BS3* should be used as a special fund (continuation of which would be reviewed in 10 years time) to support ornithological publications and special projects in Scotland. To do this a special fund, known as the *BS3* fund would be created and administered by a Council sub-committee comprising some members of SOC Council and some of the *BS3* Editorial team. The initial members shall be David Jardine (chair), Ian Andrews, Mike Martin, Norman Elkins and Chris McInerny.

Suggestions for use of the BS3 fund are now invited; these may include extending current publications (eg increasing the number of editions of *Scottish Birds* per annum), provision of grants and/or loans to aid the publication of local/regional atlases and avifaunas and other works deemed appropriate by the trustees. Specific projects which promote the development of ornithology (particularly among the youth and wider public) in Scotland will be eligible for support. Efforts shall be made to ensure that at least 50% of the funds are spent on supporting publications.

Details of awards from the fund will be published in *SBN*. Individuals or groups wishing to use the BS3 Fund in 2009 or beyond should seek an application form from mail@the-soc.org.uk.

David Jardine *Vice-President*

Neill Medal Award

Following the news of the Siver Medal award from the Zoological Society of London in SBN *89, we bring news of another accolade, this time particularly Scottish, which follows the success of the* BS3 *publication last year.*

The presentation of this medal was made at *The Royal Society of Edinburgh* 'Fellows' Triennial Dinner' held at The National Gallery of Scotland on Saturday 28th June 2008. First awarded in 1859, following a bequest from the distinguished

Ron Forrester receiving the medal from Sir Michael Atiyah, President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh

Scottish Naturalist, Dr Patrick Neill, the medal is presented for a work of excellence in the field of Natural History. The Programme at the presentation stated: 'Mr Ron Forrester, for his publication '*The Birds of Scotland*' which was published by the Scottish Ornithologists' Club in November 2007. This is a significant, scholarly and beautiful book which is a truly outstanding contribution to the study of natural history in Scotland. This award is made to Mr Forrester on behalf of all the editors of this publication.'

Medal front

Medal back

The medal is awarded triennially for a work or publication, by a Scottish Naturalist, preferably based in Scotland, on some branch of Natural History, completed or published within the last five years. The prize requires to be presented to an individual rather than an organization, and Ron has said that he hoped it would be looked upon as being on behalf of the whole BS3 team, which includes the 150+ authors and many photographers.

'Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland' project - getting more folk involved

In the June edition of *SBN*, Jacqui Kaye from BTO introduced this new project, a joint venture between BTO and SOC to boost bird recording across Scotland, generously funded by SNH, The Gillman Trusts, BTO and SOC. By the time you read this, you should have received further

A young survey recruit *Chris Wernham*

information about the project by post, including a copy of the *Birds in View* newsletter and new *Bird Atlas 2007–11* promotional leaflet.

We promised an update on the training opportunities that are being offered as part of this project... All the events in the table below are free to people that would like to brush up on their skills and gain the confidence to contribute to BTO or SOC bird surveys. Whether you feed birds in your garden, are an experienced birder or an outdoor enthusiast, there is an event for you. Many of you take part in a great deal of bird recording already of course but, if you do, please help us to promote the availability of these events to your friends or colleagues, in fact anyone you know who you think could be persuaded to get out there and involved...

'Survey Taster Days' from spring 2009

Atholl Estates, Perthshire
Wednesday 4th March 2009
Bird recording for landowners and staff

SNH Newton Stewart, Wigtownshire
Saturday 14th March 2009
Bird Atlas, Breeding Bird Survey, Wetland Bird Survey

Stirling University, Central
Saturday 28th March 2009
Bird surveys for beginners

Mugdock Country Park, Dunbartonshire
Saturday 25th April 2009 (early morning)
Bird Song

Angus Glens Ranger Base, Angus
Weekend of 16–17th May 2009
Bird ID, Bird Atlas and Bird Ringing

Aberdeenshire
April/ May 2009
Bird Atlas

Caithness
April/May 2009
Bird ID and Bird song

Borders
May 2009
Bird Atlas, Breeding Bird Survey

Glencoe Visitor Centre
Saturday 9th May 2009
Bird recording in the uplands (an introduction for hillwalkers, etc)

Stirling University, Central
6th June 2009
Nest Record Scheme

Great Glen House, Inverness
Sept/October 2009
Introduction to bird surveys and the Bird Atlas

For more information on any of these events, or to book places, please contact Robin Anderson at BTO Scotland (robin.anderson@bto.org or 01786 466 560). Please also do get in touch with Robin if you would like any further copies of the *Birds in View* newsletter or *Bird Atlas 2007–11* leaflets. We hope to have two further promotional leaflets (*Recording Birds in the Uplands* and *Why Record Birds?*: explaining the importance of bird records for applied conservation purposes) ready for distribution and promotional use in the spring.

International Gull Meeting, Scotland, February 2009

The 9th International Gull Meeting (IGM) will take place at Peterhead, North-east Scotland, from 26 February until 1 March 2009 (Thursday–Sunday inclusive). The meeting will combine a series of evening talks with daytime visits to local gull sites. The talks and field visits have been put together so as to be of interest to both ardent gull enthusiasts and those with a just passing interest in the identification, taxonomy or ecology of larids. Full details of the event, including a list of talks, information on travel and accommodation arrangements and how to reserve a place can be found at: http://chrisgibbins-gullsbirds.blogspot.com/

If you are interested in attending, please reserve these dates in your diary and contact Chris Gibbins via the links on the web site or e-mail him directly on c.gibbins@abdn.ac.uk

SBRC welcomes a new member

SBRC welcomes Hywel Maggs to its membership in November. Hywel is replacing Richard Schofield on the committee as a representative from North-east Scotland, thereby maintaining the link with local observers in that recording area. Since leaving university, Hywel has worked on nature reserves and birded the east coast in Lincolnshire, Northumberland and Kent. He spent two seasons working on Fair Isle before moving to Aberdeenshire in 2002, where he is now local recorder and sits on the local rarities committee. He has birded various European countries and travelled further afield to parts of Africa, the Middle East and New Zealand.

North-east Scotland has been well served over the years by Richard Schofield, a birder whose identification skills extend well beyond our shores. Richard, who will be well known to many of you, has been a knowledgeable contributor to the work of SBRC during the past 7 years. You've earned a well deserved break - very many thanks for all your work, from all of us on SBRC.

Angus Hogg

Jacqui Kaye

BTO contact moving on

Our main correspondent in BTO Scotland, Jacqui Kaye, has decided to move on and concentrate on religious studies. The relationship between ourselves in the SOC and BTO Scotland has always benefited from her upbeat approach and enthusiastic ideas about recruitment, training and wildlife awareness in general. We will certainly miss the friendly contact and wish her well in her future studies and career.

Update on the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

The Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group, a partnership of seven organisations including the SOC, was launched in 2003 to address the need for a co-ordinated approach to raptor monitoring, surveying and conservation. The other partners are RSPB Scotland, BTO Scotland, SNH, JNCC, Scottish Raptor Study Groups and the Rare Breeding Birds Panel. I took over from Mark Holling as the SOC representative and have attended meetings since early 2007.

Three main projects have been progressed. The publication of "Raptors: a Field Guide to Survey and Monitoring" was edited by a team of six from the Group and published in December 2006. The first edition plus reprints is sold out and a second updated edition is being prepared at present. It has had excellent reviews and will be a standard text for years to come.

All SOC members receive a copy of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Report complied by Brian Etheridge, the Raptor Monitoring Officer. This publication summarises the annual breeding data of Scottish raptors - fourteen diurnal species, four owls and that honorary raptor, the Raven. Brian is working on the 2007 report and the aim eventually is to produce each annual report early in the following year.

The publication of the Golden Eagle Conservation Framework this year by SNH was the result of comprehensive research carried out by Haworth Conservation, Natural Research and SNH. Collating peer-reviewed data on this iconic bird, setting regional targets for abundance and productivity, and pointing the way to maintaining and increasing its favourable status was a major step forward. Predictably, despite robust scientific data, the sections on human interference and persecution of eagles evoked a negative reaction from certain quarters! Work is in hand on similar frameworks for the Peregrine Falcon and Hen Harrier.

Gordon Riddle

Golden Eagle *Gordon Riddle*

Invitation to Scottish birders

The Montagu's Harrier is a migratory raptor that returns from West Africa in March to breed in agricultural fields in Extremadura, SW Spain. It nests singly or in loose colonies in cereal crops such as wheat and barley and is prone to nest destruction by harvesting operations. Recent research has shown that the high levels of mortality which can occur through nest destruction by harvesting have the potential to threaten regional breeding populations.

Harrier breeding success in any given year is dependent on various harvesting initiatives, but also the participation of volunteers in searching for and locating nests.

One problem the project faces is the sheer enormity of the task: each year more than 600 nests are protected in Extremadura. Only in the area around the AMUS centre, there are around 150 pairs over a 500km2 area. The location of all nests, followed by co-ordination with farmers, combine drivers and bailers to ensure the colony location is clearly understood before harvesting occurs involves a large amount of human resources.

The project is currently looking for volunteers to help with locating nesting colonies and monitoring harvest of the nests during May and June. Volunteers will be provided with a vehicle, fuel, accommodation and living expenses to work on the project. Work is intensive, engrossing and unforgettable. Volunteers must commit to working for the entire two month period, and show a genuine interest in the harriers and an aptitude for finding nests in a sea of barley! Experience with locating harrier nests would be most useful: the process requires a lot of attention and patience, but is rendered fascinating by the fantastic array of behaviours Montagu's Harrier exhibit at that time of year. Fergus Crystal is the English speaking (Scottish!) co-ordinator of the project and will be training volunteers on arrival. Spoken Spanish would be a bonus, but is not absolutely necessary. If you wish to volunteer, please contact Fergus Crystal with a CV by e-mail at: **ferguscrystal@yahoo.co.uk**

Mike Thornton

The West Cliffs *FIBO Image Library*

Building for the future - the new Fair Isle Bird Observatory appeal

Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust was established by the ornithologist, George Waterston in 1948, as a way of studying migrant birds and securing the future of Fair Isle and its people. Fair Isle Bird Observatory has played a pioneering role in the study of bird migration and its research on seabirds is of great importance particularly during recent dramatic changes in the marine environment.

For sixty years Fair Isle Bird Observatory has also welcomed visitors. Many come for the bird life, but all leave with lasting memories of island life. The Observatory is the lynchpin of Fair Isle's fragile economy. The welcome, the work and the way of life are closely linked and unique to Fair Isle.

The current Observatory has (just about) withstood the Shetland weather since 1969 but this has certainly taken its toll. The current visitor accommodation is comfortable but basic. It needs some upgrading if it is to continue to meet the demands of the current day visitor to the Observatory, whose stays at the Observatory are vital to the future viability of the Trust and its valuable ornithological work. The research facilities are insufficient to meet the needs of the ever-increasing numbers of students and scientists studying Fair Isle's migratory and resident birds.

The Trust have therefore decided that a new Observatory needs to be built and are eagerly awaiting the final design plans, due any moment. It is hoped that the new Observatory can be ready in time for the 2010 season. It will be a modern, eco-friendly place for visitors to stay and for scientists and students to continue their long-term research. The build will cost £4 million, over a quarter of which has already been pledged by Shetland Islands Council. Other public funds are being sought, but Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust needs to raise £1.5 million through individual donations.

The New Observatory Appeal, launched in mid-August, has so far raised over £40,000 purely from individual contributions. A very big 'THANK YOU' to all those who have donated so far. There is still some way to go to reach the £1.5m target. Please do what you can to help! For information on how to donate, please visit the website; **www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk/NewObservatory/new_obs.htm** Thank you!

Hywel Maggs

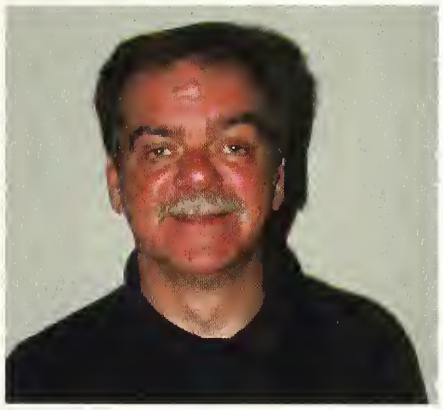
Lanceolated Warbler *FIBO Image Library*

Fair Isle Bird Observatory *FIBO Image Library*

SOC Conference

Windlestrae Hotel, Kinross *JM*

Another Annual Conference and a new venue - the Windlestrae Hotel, Kinross. This was a much more central location, very near Loch Leven and the RSPB Vane Farm Reserve, and in great birding country. After the Friday evening meal, delegates gathered in the comfortable lecture lounge to hear the first speaker of the conference - local RSPB man, Colin Shaw.



Colin Shaw *JM*

Colin Shaw - Loch Leven

As Warden of Vane Farm, Colin gave a wide ranging talk on the Reserve, it's purpose and development. Some 500 acres comprise the Reserve which is situated on Loch Leven. This is a shallow eutrophic loch which is of huge importance to geese and other wildfowl. For Pinkfeet and Greylag it is a major point of arrival and dispersal and St Serf's Island provides a safe breeding and roosting ground for a variety of duck and many Black-headed Gulls.

Being relatively close to the motorway and population centres, the Reserve lends itself to educational use and catering for children is one of its main features. While discussing management, Colin touched on water level control, the extension of scrapes, the banning of power boats, removal of trees from some areas and a grazing regime to improve the vegetation and keep 'Juncus' rush to an optimal level for Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew and Redshank.

Outwith the avifaunal kingdom, the loch is of importance for preserving the Water Vole. Mink are apparently not a major problem and even a Bumble Bee sanctuary with nine species has been established by growing suitable plants and grasses. Wind and ice difficulties were mentioned and of course climate change reared its head. Perhaps some more detailed information on the new peripheral path open would have been welcome, but this was a good inclusive overview of Loch Leven.

Campbell McLellan

As usual, the bar hosted the annual quiz - always a popular event. This year Edmund Fellowes, well known for his excellent bird photography, had devised a highly entertaining series of pictorial and demographic teasers, finishing off with some grotesque birdy composite images which kept the audience intrigued and not a little amused. What great stuff and just the right enjoyable atmosphere to start the weekend.

Saturday morning dawned wild and very wet! The planned Birdrace attracted only a modest crowd and was won by an ever-energetic Bobby Smith with a surprising total of species seen considering the weather. The usual book stalls by SOC, Subbuteo and Second Nature were there for the browser and this year, the artist Chris Rose was invited to be present in a kind of studio format where he worked on a plate for The Birds of the World publication while chatting with delegates. Also invited was Borders member Joanna Thomson who was displaying some of her very elegant silver jewellery, including pieces specially designed to feature our SOC Crested Tit emblem.

After lunch, the afternoon's programme of lectures commenced...

Andrew Macmillan, Angus Hogg & Ray Murray - Celebrating 40 years of the *Scottish Bird Report*

The five editors involved in those years were invited, but only three could attend : Andrew Macmillan, the founder editor who hatched the report, Angus Hogg who was editor for the 1980s and Ray Murray who is the present editor. They all gave very good, well composed, succinct accounts, with a lot of humour, of their time in office, using the appropriate technology of their day - Andrew with notes, Angus showing slides and Ray using power point!

In 1968, Andrew wanted a publication that would list bird records for the whole of Scotland. He had many contacts all over Scotland from his days as editor of the Edinburgh Bird Report and he persuaded them to act as local recorders for their areas. SOC Council approved and gave official status to these recorders. Bird records came in as posted cards which had to be sorted by cutting and pasting, species accounts written, typed, sent to a printer, proof read, back to printer for printing and finally sent out to members. Hard work, especially as Andrew wished it out by the following summer - a feat he managed only once!

Roy Dennis became the next compiler and in 1983 Angus Hogg took over. Around this time, various committees were set up, the Scottish Birds Record Committee in 1984 and the Raptor Study Group, which helped to process the information coming into SOC as numbers of species seen increased. The development of computers and word processing was having its effect especially in showing the various annual trends.

Alan Wood took charge in 1990 and then passed over to Ray Murray in 1990. In the 80s, species accounts had shrunk to keep costs down. Now, with desk top publishing, the ability to draw graphs, tables and put in pictures before going to the printers cut the printing costs and Ray increased the species accounts again. After the 2001 report, BS3 came along, and Ray became heavily involved. He suggested that the way forward is to follow

The SBR compilers *JM*

the Swedish route, where all the records are put into a web site, where an observer can quickly update his records - graphs, trends etc. Local recorders would still publish local bird reports. Ian Andrews is busy working on this project and it is hoped that it would be available, backdated to 2002, in the near future.

I think we owe a great deal to these members who work tirelessly on our behalf to collate our Scottish bird records using the best modern technology. Thank you, especially Andrew, Angus and Ray for taking the time to explain the past, present and future of the *Scottish Bird Report.*

Janet Crummy

Clare Smith *JM*

Claire Smith -
Sea Eagle: East Scotland reintroduction
After tea Claire brought us up to date on the efforts to re-establish White-tailed Eagles as the widespread birds they once were. As well as many written records, their long-established place in the Scottish avifauna and in human imagination is evidenced by the remains of at least 35 separate sea eagles found in the bronze age Tomb of the Eagles on South Ronaldsay. Historical records show that East coast birds were widespread in Perthshire and on the Forth and Tay estuaries. However shooting interests, egg-collecting and the spread of sheep farming changed public attitudes to the White-tailed Eagle and the last native Scottish bird died in Shetland in 1918.

In the west, White-tailed Eagles are now doing well following reintroductions on Rum in 1985–95 and in Wester Ross in the mid 90s. In 2008, 43 pairs fledged 28 chicks to give a total population of more than 200 birds. However, the east also appears to offer plenty of potential food in the form of wildfowl, waders, rabbits, fish, carrion etc. To speed up the recolonisation of the east of Scotland, a project is in progress to release 15 to 20 young birds per year in 2007–11 on a Forestry Commission site. During their period of captivity before release, the young eagles are kept in pairs and trios in cages that give them good views of their surroundings and the sky; and to make sure that they grow up as true east coasters, their diet includes offcuts from the Arbroath Smokies industry. When old enough they are ringed, radio tagged and wing tagged (not 2008); and soon after, they seem eager to leave when their cages are opened. After release some young eagles make extended tours of Scotland before settling down.

R. Hissett

Christopher McInerny - (his own account)
Skua migration in the Firth of Forth
The four species of skua observed in the North Atlantic and Scotland all complete long migrations between their breeding and wintering areas. Two of these, Arctic and Great Skuas, breed in northern Scotland, whereas Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas nest in the high Arctic.

This talk described and summarised observations made by myself and Mervyn Griffin on autumn skua migration on the east side of Scotland in the Firth of Forth from Hound Point, 2 km to the east of South Queensferry. Over a 20-year period, from 1986–2005, ~11,000 skuas were observed. Of these ~5,500 were Arctic, ~2,600 Pomarine, ~2,100 Great, and ~900 Long-tailed. These birds were seen from August through to November, entering the Firth of Forth from the east, with many passing Hound Point to the west, apparently completing overland migration to the west coast of Scotland and the Atlantic.

Two of the species, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, were seen irregularly, with just a few years revealing large numbers. This incidence probably reflects the fact that they normally prefer to migrate over deeper waters in the mid-Atlantic, and only appear in the North Sea after unusual weather conditions. In contrast, Arctic and Great Skuas were seen far more regularly, with similar numbers between years, consistent with the proposal that these two species use Scottish coastal waters for their normal migration routes. They do this possibly to follow the large numbers of terns, gulls and Gannets present in the Firth of Forth during late summer and early autumn, which they kleptoparasitize for food.

David Clugston and Chris McInerny *JM*

Details and summaries of this work can be found in *Scottish Birds* 27: 24–31, and *British Birds* 100: 506–507.

Campbell and Vicky McLellan then conducted the 200 Club special annual draw and Daphne Peirse Duncombe, although not able to be there this year, was applauded by all for her ongoing efforts in this.

Annual AGM
Chris Waltho, SOC President, gave his Annual Report in which he included mention of Kathryn Cox joining the SOC staff this year; *The Birds of Scotland* publication launch and sales ; the Atlas launch and first year; Clive McKay, Scottish Bird Records Co-ordinator nearing the end of the first stage of his work and a recent grant submission to SNH for future funding, and also the 3-year programme for the Building Bird Monitoring in Scotland project.

Dick Vernon, SOC Treasurer reported on the 2007–8 Accounts
Club activities included mention of the large income from sales at Waterston House, Dave Allan's considerable contribution there, and the continuing need for second-hand bird books. Waterston House was now "paying its way" and Club funds were more or less in balance.

The large financial contribution of *BS3* sales to Club funds.

Our portfolio of shares had shown an overall loss.

In 2008–9, sales again are doing well. Given the current economic climate, we should "sit out" the investment situation. Reasons were given and details discussed of the proposed raising of Club subscriptions and the recommendations were then carried.

Vicky McLellan who is retiring from Council was duly thanked for all her work there and the proposal of Jeremy Wilson on to Council was carried. In AOB the suggestion was made that our SOC website could be used more effectively to interest and attract younger members.

The Annual Dinner was followed by a Dance, led by the superb local 3-piece Orwell Ceilidh Band.(The £25 dinner price included this entertainment) The group taught us several Scottish dances and kept the whole atmosphere lively and

energetic - the best Saturday night event value for many years, especially for those who chose to attend!

Sunday morning was gloriously sunny - a great day for birding, but the morning's lectures beckoned...

John Calladine *JM*

John Calladine - Perthshire Hawfinches

"For me, the fascination of observing wildlife is that whether a boy of five or a man of fifty, one is always at the beginning" Jim Corbett

One of the dominant features of SOC Conference tradition is that from time to time we are given news of research projects in the early stages; thereafter, sometimes after decades, the science grows exponentially, e.g. recording, ringing, tagging and now radio telemetry - we love it! The most recent example of this phenomenon is the Hawfinch research by John Callandine and Neil Morrison - a presentation delivered by John with great vitality and humour. Of the 35 birds ringed at Scone, only one recovery has been made to date, of a Hawfinch ringed in Feb 2004, found exactly two years later in Sweden, after a fatal collision with a conservatory, in a garden occasionally visited by Hawfinches. Biotrack Ltd very graciously donated the technology of radio telemetry to the project including tiny (1 gram) radio transmitters which are fitted to the bird's central tail feathers. These have batteries which function for three weeks, allowing tracking within a 1km range. Essentially, this was a fresh start on the ecology of Scottish Hawfinches, as previously there was hardly any data other than Atlas records and Bird Reports.

So with two males fitted with transmitters in mid-Feb 2007 and one female in 2008 great beginnings - what trees are being used, what food consumed, why the female stayed so site faithful while those males ranged further? Why Scone Palace? Why not elsewhere in Scotland? Early studies suggest that Yew trees are most important, followed by Spruce and Cypress which have more significance than Hornbeams - every location with the arboreal 'jizz' of Scone should be given some extra attention by birders in mid-February, listening and watching for this intriguing finch - an atlasing target species?

The SOC is fortunate indeed to embody within its membership such dedicated, enthusiastic scientists as these whose Hawfinch study has only just begun. We look forward to reports of further discoveries.

Duncan M. Watt.

Carl Mitchell -
Pink-footed Geese in the Loch Leven area

At the outset Carl admitted that it has been known for hundreds of years that 'Pink-feet' breed in Iceland and in autumn make for Scotland (and England) to spend the winter. Nevertheless, new threats to the population may arise and we need to keep a watch out for any changes in bird behaviour or numbers.

The wider picture reveals that there are nine populations of six species of geese, totalling 500,000 birds, passing through Scotland every winter season. The Iceland and East Greenland breeders are one of the two populations of Pink-feet (the others breed in Svalbard and winter in the Netherlands).

Pink-feet spend their winters mainly at about a dozen very traditional sites in lowland Scotland ranging from Loch of Strathbeg in Aberdeenshire to the Solway coast. Roosting is mainly on freshwater bodies but also includes estuaries. The size of the population increased fairly steadily through the 1960s, 70s and early 80s but thence more rapidly to its present 300,000.

At Loch Leven, the number of Pink-feet usually peaks in October at some 16,000, but most move on further south leaving about 6,000 to stay all winter. Studies of feeding behaviour here confirm the known preference for stubbles and harvested potato fields. Birds prefer large fields without surrounding trees, presumably because these give them greater security from predators such as foxes. Less understandable is the finding that individual birds tend to use only a few of the fields frequented by the whole group of birds throughout the winter.

Graham Pyatt

Ray Murray chats to Carl Mitchell *JM*

Norman Elkins - (his own account)
Atlasing - a local perspective from Fife and Kinross

First of all there was a resumé of UK and Scottish Atlases so far and then homing in on my own BTO Region of Fife and Kinross. After a short tour of the geography and habitats of the region, with some emphasis on the proposed Kinross Atlas, a series of tetrad maps, mainly of the breeding season, were shown.. These compared the latest (2008) provisional results from the current national Atlas with data from the Fife Bird Atlas (from the 1990s). A range of different species was illustrated, in which Raven and Stonechat are following the national trend of widespread increases while others, such as Kestrel, Lapwing and Spotted Flycatcher, also nationally, are showing significant decreases. Tetrad population estimates were also discussed, demonstrated by Meadow Pipit and Willow Warbler. The latter species does not always depend on trees, as high counts on heather-clad slopes in Perthshire confirm! Some other surveys that will feed into the current atlas were discussed, notably the Wetland Bird Survey, for which regular and long-term counts of waterfowl are extremely valuable. My talk ended with speculation on the future, with the next atlas due in another 20 years time.

If you would like to have access to any power point material used in the Conference lectures, get in touch with the staff at Waterston House.

Wendy Hicks and Kathryn Cox then officiated at the SOC Raffle which realised the sum of £230 for Club funds. SOC thanks are due for all the prizes donated, including an article of jewellery from Joanna Thomson.

Finally Chris Waltho brought the Conference to an end by thanking the speakers and everyone involved, especially Wendy and Kathryn who had worked so hard in the background to ensure things progressed smoothly, and Stephen Hunter for his usual expert attention to all the technical details. He then wished members a pleasant and safe drive home, as well as indicating that next year's Annual Conference would centre its interest on the Bird Observatories, celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Isle of May Bird Observatory.

Jimmy Maxwell

Numbers were lower than usual at this Annual Conference. To help the organisers arrange future occasions, if you did not attend this year, it would be greatly appreciated if you could give management the reason for this, especially if it concerned the timing, the venue location or the content. A brief phone call, e-mail or note would suffice. Thank you.

Poisoned Buzzard, Tayside, May 2008 *RSPB*

The RSPB Scotland Investigations team targets its work at wildlife crime that has an adverse effect on the populations of those species of a high conservation priority and in geographical areas where this continues to be a significant problem. As such, inevitably, much of their work remains focused on the illegal killing of birds of prey. They maintain a close liaison and work in partnership with all the Scottish Police Forces, the Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspections Directorate and other agencies and individuals involved in the monitoring of these species and the detection, investigation and prosecution of wildlife crime offences.

Introduction

The persecution of Scotland's birds of prey has been a prominent issue for many decades. This matter is of serious conservation concern as it undermines the populations of some of our most vulnerable bird species. It also discredits the international reputation of Scotland as a place that safeguards its natural heritage. The practice of eliminating all the possible predators of game on shooting estates was a routine procedure in the 19th and early 20th centuries, with little or no regard to the conservation status of the targeted birds or animals. Ultimately, the phenomenal numbers of birds killed resulted in national and regional extinctions of a number of species such as Osprey, White-tailed Eagle and Goshawk.

Many of these species, such as the Buzzard or Red Kite, have made significant recoveries in recent years either through natural re-colonisation or through reintroduction by humans. This has followed a reduction in illegal killing as legislation to protect these species has been strengthened and attitudes towards predators have become more enlightened. Unfortunately, this generally positive trend has not been universal. The ongoing poor conservation status of some species of birds of prey (for example, Golden Eagles and Hen Harriers) remains of concern. It is clear that in some regions of Scotland, particularly in the uplands, 19th century attitudes and practices are still firmly entrenched amongst some of Scotland's 21st century land managers.

Recent issues

Following 2006 being the worst year for bird of prey poisoning recorded in Scotland for at least 25 years, with 44 confirmed incidents, the continued high number recorded in 2007, including 12 Red Kites, re-iterates how widespread this indiscriminate practice continues to be. Poisoning may be considered to constitute the greatest threat of all forms of persecution, as it is indiscriminate. In contrast to shooting or trapping, which requires a sustained effort by the criminal concerned to produce a limited return, poisoning can have a substantial impact with only minimal effort. Poison baits continue to be lethal over a period of days or weeks and can kill multiple victims without further effort by the culprit. Any poison bait used in the open within habitat used by birds of prey has the potential to kill those birds. This is true regardless of the intentions of the poisoner. The table below gives some indication as to the extent of the problem.

Other forms of persecution typically involve nest destruction (removal or killing of eggs or young and/or physical removal of nest); shooting; misuse of spring traps; misuse of crow cage traps.

As an example, in 2007, as in previous years, a significant number of Hen Harrier breeding attempts, particularly in SE Strathclyde, failed suspiciously, with human interference strongly suspected. This evidence was uncovered through rigorous monitoring of the area by members of the local Raptor Study Groups and RSPB Scotland staff. Of particular concern is the fact that many of these failures occurred within the Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area (SPA), notified by the Scottish Government due to its importance for breeding Hen Harriers on a UK and EU scale. It is also apparent that this species continues to be absent from, or declining in, large areas of apparently suitable grouse moor habitat, including sites where

Table 1. Number of confirmed victims of illegal poisoning 1998–2007
(data from RSPB Scotland Persecution reports 1998–2006)

Year	Red Kite	Golden Eagle	White-tailed Eagle	Buzzard	Peregrine	Raven	Other bird species	Animals	Total
1998	4	2		23	2		3	9	**43**
1999	1	2		7		2		1	**13**
2000	4	3		23			15	1	**46**
2001	10	1		9			9	2	**31**
2002	1	2	2	7	2		28		**42**
2003	10		1	23	3	4	33	1	**75**
2004	3			40	3		5	3	**54**
2005	2	1		14		2	3		**22**
2006	5	2		26	1	6	4	1	**45**
2007	12	1		15	4	2	3	4	**41**
Total	**52**	**14**	**3**	**187**	**15**	**16**	**103**	**22**	**412**

Persecution 1998–2007 *RSPB*

it was well established in the recent past, for example in north and east Scotland.

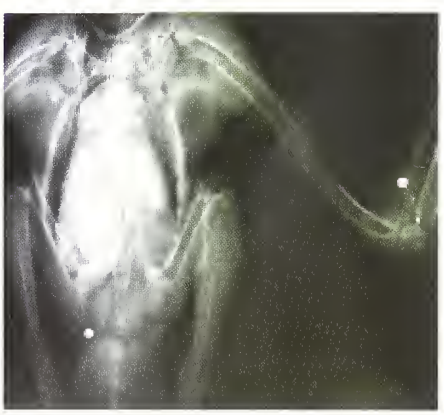
In eastern and southern Scotland, Raptor Study Group data also consistently identifies poorer breeding performance by Peregrines on managed grouse moors than on other upland land-use areas. In a situation similar to that of the Hen Harrier, several breeding attempts in 2007 failed suspiciously, often with a concurrent disappearance of adult birds; in several cases, this was a repeat of several previous years' incidents.

Overall, the known level of continuing persecution is still very much a cause for concern. Raptors' ecological characteristics make them particularly vulnerable to any additional mortality caused by deliberate killing. Raptors tend to be long-lived, breed slowly and produce few young. In respect of the Hen Harrier, a species specially protected under UK and EU legislation, the situation remains critical to the extent that its population and range is held far below its natural level in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. Poisoning is a serious threat to the success of the Red Kite and White-tailed Eagle re-introduction programmes and the recent may pose a long-term threat to the stability of the Golden Eagle population (Whitfield *et al*, 2007).

The number of incidents detected will be a very small proportion of the total and the true level of illegal killing of raptors is very difficult to measure due to the nature of the terrain in which these offences take place and the secrecy surrounding such criminal activities. However, 2007 was the worst year we have recorded for the deliberate poisoning of Red Kites in Scotland, and there are substantial areas of suitable habitat unoccupied by breeding birds of prey as a direct result of continued persecution. The level of confirmed cases of deliberate and illegal poisoning recorded over the last five years suggests that these offences continue to be widespread. The distribution of incidents (*shown in the map opposite*) illustrates the fact that incidents are not evenly or randomly spread throughout the country, but are largely concentrated in the upland areas of the east and south, co-incident with the distribution of game shooting interests, particularly driven grouse moors.

A poisoned eagle and a way forward?

The shocking news in August 2007 that a Golden Eagle had been found poisoned in the Scottish Borders stunned everyone involved in the conservation of wildlife in Scotland and the UK.



X-ray of Red Kite shot in Lothian & Borders, June 2008 *RSPB*

The case was a particularly tragic one as the dead bird was the female of the only breeding pair of Golden Eagles found in the Scottish Borders, the pair having nested successfully unmolested for many years. Politicians from all political parties along with landowners and countryside organisations joined in the condemnation of the continued killing of one of Scotland's most iconic species. A subsequent debate in the Scottish Parliament about wildlife crime saw a motion, condemning those responsible for such acts that destroy vital parts of our natural and national heritage while damaging our international reputation, passed unanimously. The debate concluded with the announcement of a thematic inspection of arrangements for the prevention, investigation and prosecution of wildlife crime undertaken by HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in association with HM Chief Inspector of Prosecutions in Scotland.

'Natural Justice, A joint thematic inspection of the arrangements in Scotland for preventing, investigating and prosecuting wildlife crime' (http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/218661/0058716.pdf) was published on the 8th of April 2008. The report highlighted the need for a clear wildlife crime reduction strategy from the Scottish Government and for an inclusive national partnership structure to take this forward.

The key to building on the high priority given by the Scottish Government to tackling wildlife crime, of which the illegal killing of birds of prey is a key component, is the effective use of the legislation through robust enforcement. RSPB Scotland welcomed the report and the 24 main recommendations. It is hoped that the work undertaken by the review panel and submissions given by police, partner organisations and members of the public will be seen to lead to a real reduction of wildlife crime incidents in the coming years.

For further information, contact the RSPB Scotland Investigations team:
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Help stop the killing now!
http://www.rspb.org.uk/supporting/campaigns/birdsofprey/

Scraperboard: an expressive medium

Tommy at work

Two years ago I had the pleasure of being invited to provide a number of illustrations of birds that had been recorded but not photographed in Scotland for the recently published landmark publication *'The Birds of Scotland'*. This year I had the opportunity to exhibit the resulting drawings alongside John Busby's lively and evocative watercolour paintings for the book at the SOC headquarters in Aberlady this July. The medium I chose for these illustrations was Scraperboard, a material in common use a number of years ago among professional book illustrators and graphic artists but much less used nowadays. Indeed most art stores appear to have discontinued selling the large sheets of plain white that I use in favour of fancy gold and silver versions in small craft packs with a pre-printed image and it is only thanks to the Internet that I have been able to find a supplier.

Those of you my age who were at school in the early 50s may remember being introduced to Scraperboard in the art class by being handed a small square of shiny black card and a sharp stylus or scraper to scratch out a drawing with white lines against the black background. However, judging by the number of interested enquiries about the technique from visitors to the launch night of the exhibition I realised that perhaps not many people are really familiar with how the images were created or indeed what kind of material it is. It was to answer these queries it was suggested that I write this.

Scraperboard comprises three layers - a cardboard base, a smooth layer of Kaolin or China clay and a coat of black ink. Using a variety of sharp scrapers this ink layer is scratched through to expose a pattern of white lines and dots -"hatching and stippling" to create a variety of textures and tones that make up the desired image. These images can have either an incredible amount of detail and a rich variety of greys or be simple bold patterns of black and white that reproduce well in print. For this reason it was introduced in France and Britain in the 19th Century for artists preparing newspaper illustrations where previously more laborious wood or metal engraving would have been used.It was popular because, while it had all the appearance of wood engraving, it was itself a drawing technique and not a printmaking process and so could be done much more quickly, allow some correction of mistakes and be reproduced with a crisp sharp effect by the new processes available in printing. It became the preferred technique of medical and scientific illustrators in the 30s and 50s and of the many commercial artists illustrating books, magazines and adverts. The Radio Times, until photographic illustration took over in later years, was a particularly rich source for a fascinating wealth of Scraperboard vignettes in different styles. Notably however, it was used by many wildlife artists such as Donald Watson in eg. "The Hen Harrier", "B.B" (Denys Watkins-Pitchford (1905–1990) in "Wild Lone - the Story of a Pytchley Fox" and C.F.Tunnicliffe in the many books he illustrated.

Although it can be supplied already coated with black ink, many artists prefer to work on the white board applying either black ink, thin washes of grey or even coloured inks where needed, leaving areas blank to avoid unnecessary scraping out.

I personally prefer to work on white board using thin washes of watered down ink to build up the image before I start to work into it with a scraper. I usually start from sketches from observation as in the drawing of a Shag on its nest on the McCormaig Isles observed on a hot still day. Leaving much of the rocks white and barely suggested helped to create the impression of the glare of sunlight silhouetting the bird. Fine lines were then worked curving around the bird build up the form.

Shag

Manx Shearwater

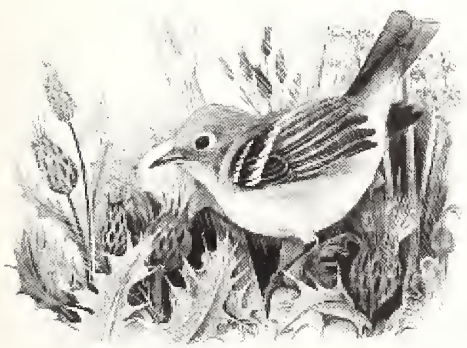
However black Scraperboard was more appropriate for a night scene of a Manx Shearwater at its burrow lit by torch light. In this case only those parts of the bird and the plants around it caught in the torchlight needed to be picked out and highlighted in white for effect leaving an indication of the black shadow cast by the bird for further emphasis.

Once I have an image in mind and have planned it out in a pencil drawing, I trace it and after rubbing the back of the tracing with a very soft pencil, transfer it carefully to the surface of the white board prior to applying washes of inkWhite chalk is used for transferring images to black Scraperboard before inking up. The choice of whether to use solid black ink or thin washes depends on what kind of image is wanted.

bird and make a base for picking out the feather shapes, patterns and textures as might be observed in even light. Emphasising the textures and shapes of the surrounding plants created further interest. Indeed Scraperboard can be at its most effective when depicting a variety of textures. The different scraper tools each have a distinctive 'line' and by varying the pressure with which they are used, the direction of the hatched lines and dots and the way they are overlaid on each other, the variation in textures created are endless. Sometimes it can be preferable to use other means to depict textures or tones.In creating the effect of sea spray behind the Royal Tern among a group of Sandwich Terns for '*The Birds of Scotland*', a few circular rubs of sandpaper over the grey background wash was more effective than trying to use any scraper.

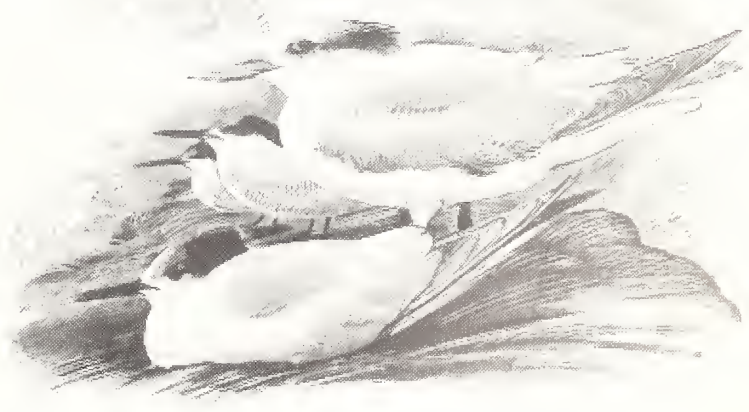
Scraperboard is a medium that was originally used solely and very skillfully for making black and white images for reproduction. Nowadays it is recognised as lending itself to imaginative experiment with coloured inks, different underlying metallic layers and even for forming the basis for building up colour images in Photoshop. Perhaps with my background in sculpture, it is just the slow rhythmic scraping away at a surface to build up form, like chiselling out shapes in a piece of wood or stone, that appeals to me. Whatever the case, it is certainly a medium worth trying out.

Tommy Daniels



Chestnut-sided Warbler

With the drawing of the Chestnut-sided Warbler for "*The Birds of Scotland*" the intention was to make an accurate depiction of the bird and the habitat it was found in, as described in the recorders notes. Using thin washes of light grey to black allowed me to model the form of the



Royal Tern

Birding in Vermont (Part 1)

Common Loons (Gouache) *Richard Daly*

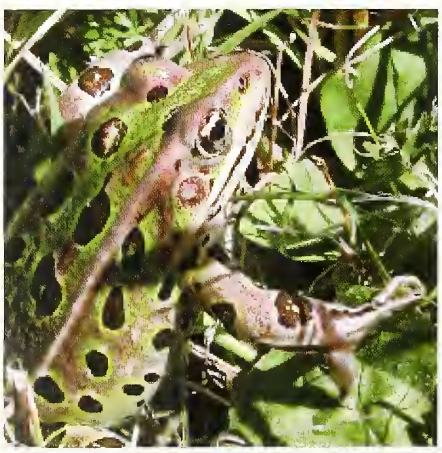
Many SBN readers ask for new ideas about good birdwatching areas. In the following, Richard Daly shares some of his paintings with us and describes mouth-watering encounters with birds etc. on the wildlife-rich trails of Vermont in the fall. Ed.

For some 20 years my wife and I have made regular visits to North America's wilderness areas to observe, sketch, and film the wonderful birds and wildlife there. Recently we opted for a gentler region - Vermont, famous for its Fall colour, inns, red barns, and moonlight! Turns out it is rather splendid for its flora and fauna too! This article serves as an introduction to Vermont and describes just a few of the many fine areas for viewing birds and wildlife. (This first part....Part 1 deals with the Lake Champlain Valley, whilst Part 2 in the next issue of *SBN* introduces sites in the Green Mountain regions.

Missisquoi National Park Reserve

Situated at the northernmost end of Lake Champlain close to the Canadian border at Swanton, Missisquoi is the only National Refuge in Vermont. It occupies some 800 acres and includes woodland, swamp, and river habitats as well as lakeside. Our route there took us past Mount Arrowhead Lake where we viewed a spectacular fishing display by a Belted Kingfisher - an area also frequented by the majestic Common Loons. At Missisquoi Refuge H.Q. we were provided with some excellent brochures and trail maps. As we ventured out on the short circular *Discovery Trail*, alongside a pond, we were met by scores of small leaping Northern Leopard Frogs. Dragonflies dazzled in the bright September sunshine - hundreds of Yellow Legged Meadowhawks, a large Canada Darter, and several Bluets, the latter amazing us, not for the first time, with their fluorescent colour. Beyond the pond sat a Dark Eyed Junco and a large flock of Bonaparte Gulls wheeled above us, shimmering white against the deep blue sky. As we wound our way through the woodlands the ubiquitous Eastern Chipmunks were evident and we paused to listen to a loud drumming nearby. With an explosive flapping of wings, a Ruffed Grouse thrashed its way free from the undergrowth. The circular trail ended in a large meadowland, where countless butterflies (Clouded Yellow, Mustard White, Orange Sulphur and Meadow Fritillary) fluttered around our feet. We paused again to watch Carolina Locusts do their "changing" acts - one moment a grasshopper, the next a "butterfly" with wings!

We then opted to follow the longer *Louis Landing Trail* alongside the Missisquoi River. A Broad Winged Hawk, its wing tips and tail backlit in bright sunshine, soared above us, whilst an American Kestrel sat atop a telegraph pole beside some Tree Swallows on the nearby wires. As we had our picnic lunch our attention centred on



Northern Leopard Frog *Richard Daly*

an elegant Great Blue Heron and a marvellous sighting - a migrating flock of 60 Red Winged Blackbirds. We then made our way across the Refuge to the swampland area. On the *Black Creek Trail* we were greeted by a juvenile Yellow Bellied Sapsucker. Black Headed Chickadees were easily spotted in good numbers but it took considerable time to pin down a very shy Warbling Vireo. (Incidentally, New World Warblers in the Fall present major difficulties in identification, with plumage greatly altered from the dazzling breeding colours of Spring. Perhaps tired after their long journeys northwards, in Spring the warblers are quite easy to photograph and even sketch. In the Fall, as they prepare for migration again, they are jumpy and fidgety and well nigh impossible to photograph!)

As we left Black Creek and joined the *Macquam Creek Trail* through the swampland, passed the Beaver Lodge and continued through the bordering trees, my wife suddenly announced, "You know this is just right for Painted Turtles". Of course, 30 yards further along the trail there they were on cue - three of them sitting on a log in the swamp, surrounded by Fragrant Water Lilies. When we emerged from the swamps into open ground, the scene transformed, ablaze with colour with Winterberry, Chicory, Rough Stemmed Golden Rod and Yellow Wild Indigo in prominence and amongst the flowers the flashing wings of Monarch and Mourning Cloak Butterflies.

Our lasting impression of Missisquoi is that of its great variety of habitat and wildlife - and an all-embracing tranquillity.

Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area

Situated south of Burlington near the town of Addison in the Champlain Lowlands, Dead Creek comprises some 2,800 acres of open meadow, marshland and waterways, making it excellent habitat for wetland birds and providing a fine area to watch migration to and from Canada in the relevant months.

On the edge of Dead Creek, we stopped off at the *Goose Viewing Area* on Route 17. As we left our car, we were delighted to watch c. 150 Snow Geese fly in, followed by 30 Brant. (By mid-October some 20,000 Snow Geese gather in these fields as they migrate from the Canadian Arctic to winter in the South East.) Meanwhile, a Bald Eagle flew majestically overhead, and years of searching came to an end when we finally saw an Indigo Bunting among a small flock of Savannah Sparrows in the corn about 20 yards away. On reaching the main marshlands and water area of Dead Creek, we had many sightings of Great Blue Herons, and on

some mudflats great close viewing of several Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs - very elegant waders. On a small pond a single dead tree trunk, bleached by the sun, served as a pontoon for 20 Painted Turtles, and a couple of Bull Frogs chorused beside them. As we lunched in the shade of some trees an Eastern Wood Peewee looked down on us and a Red-tailed Hawk overflew the Creek. Blue Winged Teal flew low over the larger pond as we departed.

Lake Champlain Area

From Dead Creek, we journeyed to *Button Bay State Park Natural Area* on the shore of Lake Champlain. As we walked the trail leading to Button Point, we had our usual Blue Jay and 11 Cedar Waxwings. Then, at the lakeside, Great Black Backed Gulls and Canada Geese arrived. Our attention was drawn to a large colourful fungus alongside the trail - later identified as Artist's Fungus. After ages of observation and uncertainty, a solitary wader at the furthermost edge of the Point turned out to be a very attractive Dowitcher. Our return along the wooded *Champlain Trail* yielded countless numbers of Red and Gray Squirrels and Eastern Chipmunks, another Eastern Wood Peewee and a Least Flycatcher, the latter being very fidgety and impossible to photograph! Orange Sulphur Butterflies flew in great numbers everywhere.

Our walk along the *Recreation Trail* from Burlington Waterfront produced the usual Ring-billed Gulls and Double Crested Cormorants and a single Red-breasted Merganser. House Sparrows, twittering in the shrubbery, and a flock of European Starlings made us feel as if we were back in Scotland until, between the shore and the Northern Light breakwater, a Belted Kingfisher undertook a series of spectacular

Great Blue Heron *Richard Daly*

Greater Yellowlegs (Gouache) *Richard Daly*

Artist's Fungus *Richard Daly*

crash dives into the still water. Later we sailed on the M.V. Northern Lights on Lake Champlain in the forlorn hope of sighting at least one of the three Jaeger species which use the lake as a southbound flyway. It was to no avail, though a small group of White Winged Scoters did their best. The main excitement was provided by six Monarch butterflies. As we stood on the boat in mid lake we watched in wonder as they flew directly south over the vast expanse of Lake Champlain. Presumably, to fly some 112 miles down the middle of the lake is no big deal to these marvellous creatures, given that their ultimate destination is Mexico! (Some 15 years ago we took an evening walk along the Saco River in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Along the riverside, the trees were festooned with thousands of Monarchs resting on their long journey. It is moments like this that keep drawing us back to North America.) Afterwards we visited *La Platte River Marsh Trail* and were joined by a flock of Song Sparrows and serenaded by Black Capped Chickadees. At one point we were confronted by a huge Snapping Turtle. In my hurry to photograph some Killdeer I pushed through some undergrowth and caused three Bull Frogs to leap from their grassy bank into the river in a single bound. Spectacular! A graceful Solitary Sandpiper joined the Killdeer. As we ended our walk we chanced upon an orange-brown butterfly with "scalloped" wing edges - the Question Mark butterfly. What an unusual name?

Mount Philo Hawkwatch

The climb up Mount Philo is worth the effort to join the local Hawkwatch team during Fall migration. The views across Lake Champlain to the Adirondack Mountains alone make it worthwhile but when you can add to that Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Harrier, Red-shouldered Hawk, Bald and Golden Eagles, Cooper's Hawk, Turkey Vulture, Osprey, American Kestrel and Merlin plus a Downy Woodpecker in the bush beside you, it is indeed worthwhile. Never satisfied though - 10 days earlier 3,006 Broad-winged Hawks passed through!

Richard H. Daly

RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve

The Centre *RSPB*

The RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve was set up in 1973. The only other RSPB reserve in the west of Scotland at that time was Horse Isle, off the Ayrshire coast. The reserve forms part of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, and is a major part of the Castle Semple and Barr Lochs Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is also one of the main RSPB reserves in Scotland for visitors, attracting about 35,000 people in recent years.

Much of what was known about the wildlife of the area was due to the efforts of many local birdwatchers, in particular Louis Urquhart and Bob Caldow; the latter was instrumental in persuading the RSPB to have a reserve at Lochwinnoch. Other people who contributed much to our early knowledge included Iain Gibson, George White, Ron Jeffrey and Roger Meekin. Not to be forgotten is the late Wallace Wild, who diligently carried out the monthly Wildfowl Counts for more than 20 years before handing over to the RSPB in 1975.

At 159 hectares, the reserve is now a good mix of open water, swamp, fen, grassland, scrub and woodland. The floodplain area has been subject to much intervention and agricultural improvement over the last 250 years, centred on the creation and management of an extensive water meadow system within what is now Barr Loch. Prior to this, the low-lying land would have resembled a relatively natural floodplain dominated by fen vegetation, fragments of which still remain.

Being of easy access and with its reputation for being welcoming, the reserve is a popular place for both experienced birdwatchers and beginners alike. There are hides, trails and of course the visitor centre which is open daily. More than 110 species of birds are recorded annually and the reserve is important for a variety of species including breeding Water Rail, Grasshopper Warbler, Reed Bunting and Sedge Warbler. Large numbers of wildfowl are present in the winter months on one or more of the water bodies in the Lochwinnoch area. More than 20 species of mammals have been recorded including Otters, which seem to be increasing, Badgers and Roe Deer. Recent interest has focused on Lepidoptera and 15 species of butterfly and more than 110 of moth have been recorded, including a few new or uncommonly recorded species for the area, such as Haworth's Minor, Butterbur, Crescent, Vapourer and Pale Pinion.

Gold Spangle Moth *Paula Baker*

The reserve shop is also a very important resource stocking a wide variety of bird food, feeders, optics, natural history books and wildlife-themed gift items. 100% of the profits go back in to conservation. Helpful and knowledgeable staff and a wide range of products on the shelves, easily make this the best place to buy books and optics in the West of Scotland.

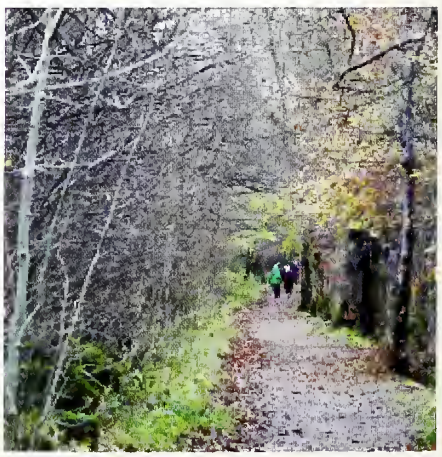
The reserve itself has two main visitor trails: the Dubbs Trail, which is on an elevated bank with marshland on either side, and the Aird Meadow Trail. The latter has two birdwatching hides giving excellent views of the Aird Meadow Loch and runs through some beautiful mixed deciduous woodland, before finally reaching a stunning viewpoint overlooking Castle Semple Loch.

The Aird Meadow is managed for the benefit of breeding Lapwing and wintering wildfowl. The meadow is usually topped by a tractor in late summer, followed by some work with brush cutters and followed by grazing, usually with highland cattle. At present, other management on the reserve is mainly for health & safety and visitor reasons.

Peter Bowyer - Lochwinnoch's First Reserve Manager

Peter was appointed to Lochwinnoch in order to establish the reserve and develop a Visitor Centre at a suitable location. The importance of the area for breeding birds and large numbers of wintering wildfowl, especially Greylag Goose, Whooper Swan and diving duck was well known. Scarce species such as Smew were annual. During the 50s and 60s, the Barr Meadows was a breeding site for many thousands of Black-headed Gulls. By the time the RSPB acquired the site, the bund around the Barr Loch had been seriously breached in a couple of places and the weir built at the outlet of Castle Semple Loch was also a constraint to the restoration of the Barr Meadows. However, at that time, Barr Loch was effectively a flooded marsh and held one of the largest local populations of breeding Great Crested Grebes, with up to twenty pairs seen displaying regularly during the season.

Short-eared Owls and Hen Harriers were regular hunters over the marshland along with locally breeding Kestrels and Sparrowhawks. Waders such as Snipe, Redshank, Curlew and Black-tailed Godwits were regular visitors in spring and autumn. The reserve with its mix of open shallow water, marsh fringes, reed beds and woodland hosted good varieties of bird species and plant communities, including rarities. There was always something of interest whatever the season. A taste of what the restored meadows (with water level control) may have been like was experienced on the day when the Jean Core hide was formally opened many years ago and the muddy bay it overlooked was swarming with passage waders including Ruff, Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits.



The Aird Meadow Trail *Lang Stewart*

The Reserve from the air *RSPB*

Peter told us about his experiences at the reserve: "My early remit was to establish the reserve, develop a rapport with local landowners and develop the Nature Centre. In those days, there was some hostility to the reserve by local farmers whose ground was grazed by the geese, but I felt my agricultural background helped me to develop relationships with the landowners. Some became good friends over the years with one or two grudgingly accepting what we were attempting to do but maintaining their own stand on conservation issues.

"I was known locally as "the bird man", and the reserve was always a good topic of conversation at drinks parties and other social get-togethers. Local groups of members were very enthusiastic about the new focus and we had many productive weekends laying out nature trails, building screening, digging out ponds and planting trees, culminating on most occasions with a trip to the Garthland Arms pub in the evening for a thirst quencher.

"Once I had identified a suitable site for the Nature Centre, we set about clearing scrub from the area in 1975 and laid out a car park, thus providing the first proper access to the reserve. The company carrying out this work brought in a £37,000 Kamatsu digger, but within two hours of its arrival from the docks, I had a photograph of this massive machine sinking into the Aird Meadow marshes. Luckily, it was dragged clear before it disappeared, much to everyone's relief. It was about this time that we were adopted by a lovely old lady from the village, Miss McIntyre, who arrived at the reserve promptly off the two o'clock bus. She then wandered down the nature trail feeding the birds as she went. Over time she attracted a Water Rail, which appeared in the same place almost every day, and she fed it. It became known as the McIntyre Rail.

"Having finally agreed the design for the Nature Centre, it was built using Trybo Norwegian Cabins from Trysil near Oslo. Two joiners were sent over with the units in the summer of 1977 and constructed each unit in a day. The base units were laid on pre-constructed foundations, usually at about 6am and we carried on building until the roof slabs were fitted, quite often at around 10pm . It was a real adrenalin buzz working with these Norwegians who took a great pride in their work and had a wonderful sense of humour. Many local friends offered their services at critical times to manhandle the larger sections and help with the numerous problems which inevitably arise during this kind of work. It was a very happy time.

"The official opening of the Centre was planned for May 1978 and a hit squad from RSPB HQ in Sandy headed north to help to set up the shop and install the displays. I remember the arrival of this squad very well. The lorry bringing all the displays caught fire on the M6, luckily without damage to the displays, but the vehicle had to be towed for the rest of its journey and finally arrived at Lochwinnoch at 1am! We spent the next two weeks building display units, erecting stands, photographs and the shop, working late into the night on many occasions. Our efforts culminated in an official opening by Lord Donaldson on May 8th 1978.

"I, along with many RSPB staff involved with the setting up of Lochwinnoch, have either moved on or retired, but the one person who has made an immense contribution to the running of the Lochwinnoch Centre since the beginning is Joan Shaw. I can honestly say that Joan was the best staff appointment I ever made in over forty years of business. Her input to Lochwinnoch was rewarded with an MBE a few years ago, much to my delight. Joan retired in 2007 to finally get more time to spend with her grandchildren. David Mower, our first reserve warden, has moved on to Leighton Moss but is still working with the Society."

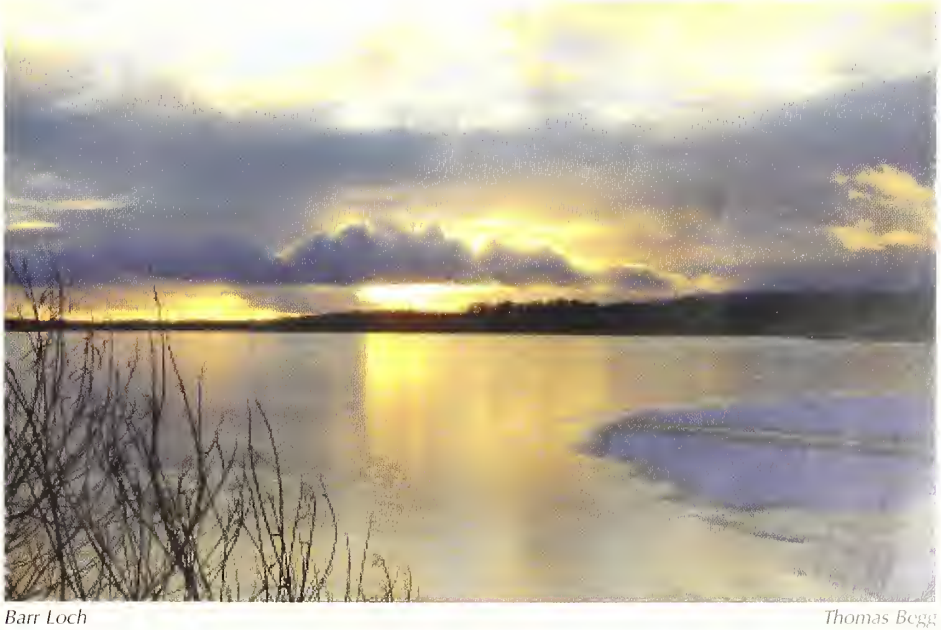
Recent projects

Barr Loch Project: As mentioned earlier, man has modified the wetlands on the floodplain for a very long time. These modifications place big constraints on our wetland management and the activities that are carried out as a result.

The Barr Loch forms about two-thirds of the reserve area. Currently, it is a shallow loch and the RSPB had hoped to restore the meadow with associated wildlife populations that were once there. In 2007, the RSPB commissioned a very detailed feasibility study to consider various different management options available to achieve this vision for the Barr Loch. The results of this survey were unfortunately disappointing in terms of what the RSPB originally wanted to achieve, and it was concluded that a large scale restoration project was not feasible on grounds of cost, sustainability and hydrology.

However, all is not lost! It is still RSPB's aim to put the wetland in better functional condition for all features using the management tools available to us. There will be habitat improvements at the Barr Loch through the creation of an array of islands, which will improve conditions for breeding birds such as Black-headed Gulls, waders and breeding ducks, as well as acting as a barrier to wave action and encouraging better emergent vegetation with the hope of encouraging recolonisation by Black-necked Grebe amongst other species. The reserve team will also be working with neighbouring landowners for better floodplain management, which will help local populations of breeding waders.

The Semple Trail and SRANI: SRANI is the South Renfrewshire Access Network Initiative, a project that aims to establish a network of paths linking routes, facilities and attractions in and around the



Barr Loch *Thomas Begg*

Lochwinnoch area. The RSPB is one of many partners involved with this project, which has so far proved to be very beneficial not only for the local community, but also to the many visitors to the area.

The project team has already developed and created a new safe off-road path from Lochwinnoch railway station and the RSPB reserve to the village and the facilities and attractions there. The next phase of the project linked the reserve to Castle Semple Loch and the National Cycle Route No.7. The latest phase just completed links Parkhill Wood, with it great array of bluebells in spring and breeding woodland birds, the 500-year old Collegiate Church, Kenmure Hill (outstanding views of the floodplain) and Howwood village from where you can join one of the trails developed by the Howwood Wildlife and Woodlands group or get a short train ride back to Lochwinnoch. By popular vote, the new network is called 'The Semple Trail'.

The SRANI project is ongoing and future plans for the project include looking at the feasibility of improving access to the Aird Meadow (including the Peel Tower), improving access to key viewpoints around the Barr Loch and linking up with existing paths in the Lochwinnoch area. The area is rich in cultural, landscape and built heritage too and the project aims to make some of the assets more accessible.

Better interpretation and signage will be incorporated and the project aims to make Lochwinnoch an outstanding day out for visitors whatever their interests.

Birds and Wildlife

The reserve has a good array of breeding birds, which staff and volunteers go out and survey annually. The 2008 breeding birds included 143 pairs of Sedge Warbler, 7 pairs of Grasshopper Warbler, 43 pairs of Reed Bunting, 7 pairs of Great Crested Grebe plus a further 43 breeding species. There have also been Kingfishers breeding on the River Calder for the last two years.

Local Kingfisher *Zul Bhatia*

Duncan at work *Lang Stewart*

Wintering wildfowl numbers can be exceptional in some years (when there is a good bloom of pondweeds). For example, in the last couple of years the reserve has had the highest count of Wigeon (600) and the second highest count of Coot (450) in the Clyde area. There are also regularly up to 40 Whooper Swans on the reserve and Smew can be seen most years. Hen Harriers can often be seen hunting over the reed/sedge beds throughout the winter.

Because the reserve has been established for a long while, quite a few rarities have been recorded. These include Red-crested Pochard (seen for three weeks in 2008), Lesser Scaup, American Black Duck, Spotted Crake, Bittern, Eye-browed Thrush, Reed Warbler (which was a first for Renfrewshire) plus various seabirds and waders such as Manx Shearwater, Temminck's Stint, Red-necked Phalarope and Arctic Skua.

Visitors and Volunteers

Lochwinnoch nature reserve has over the years developed into one of the most popular RSPB reserves in Scotland. It is an excellent place to come for a day out, has a wide variety of wildlife to be seen all year round and it is easy to see more than 50 species on a visit to the reserve.

In addition to the facilities already mentioned, there is a comfortable ground-level viewing area with binoculars and telescopes that can be freely used, as well as a tower overlooking the Aird Meadow, which is the perfect place to start your day's birdwatching. Hot drinks and snacks are available, all of which are either locally produced or carry the *Fairtrade* logo, and plenty of information about seeing wildlife on and around the reserve can be provided by our friendly team of staff and volunteers.

There is also a wide-ranging events programme that runs throughout the year, with evening talks, guided walks, coffee mornings, family events and much more besides. Details of our events can be found at www.rspb.org.uk and then search for **Lochwinnoch**.

The reserve is an excellent place to volunteer, with over 100 volunteers annually who give us their time. In 2007/08, this amounted to over 9,000 hours. Our volunteers are very much part of the team and their range of skills and abilities are fantastic – our work could not be achieved without them! However, no skills at all are needed to help, just enthusiasm, willingness and a love of wildlife. Volunteers can help us with pretty much anything, from bird surveys to helping with reserve events, from inputting biological data to helping in the shop, and from repairing and maintaining the reserve visitor facilities to fulfilling a lifelong ambition and visiting Horse Isle.

Work party on Horse Island *Paula Baker*

If you have some free time and are wondering what to do with it, come in for a chat and there might be something right for you! It is also true to say that due the workload of the existing staff and the shortage of skilled observers, parts of the reserve's recording area are still under-watched and there is plenty of scope to make new discoveries.

The Future

Who can say what the future may hold? The reserve itself has gone through many changes in 35 years and hopefully it will continue to thrive and improve. The team are progressing the expansion and improvement of the reserve facilities for visitors and have been looking to increase wildlife-viewing opportunities and install new camera systems. Regular sightings of ospreys during 2008 have meant the plans could potentially include an osprey platform viewing system, as well as other opportunities such as an otter holt viewing project.

Comments and suggestions are always welcome and the reserve team is happy to find the answers to any queries you may have about the reserve, the RSPB, or wildlife in the local area.

Please get in touch by emailing Lochwinnoch@rspb.org.uk, phoning 01505 842663 or writing to us at RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve, Largs Road, Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire, PA12 4JF.

In any case, please come and visit us soon!

Paula Baker and the reserve team

Greenland Barnacle Geese in Scotland 2008

Approaching Gunna from the air - a typical view when looking for Barnacle Geese *Carl Mitchell*

Being strapped to the underside of a light aircraft and hurtling around the Outer Hebrides at 100 knots in March may not be everyone's idea of a grand day out, but you do an lasting impression of the west of Scotland. When I say strapped to the bottom of a light aircraft what I actually mean is sitting next to the pilot, safe and warm, checking offshore islands for geese. Such was my task in March 2008, when the latest international census of the Greenland-breeding population of Barnacle Goose was carried out.

Between 1959 and 2008, twelve full censuses have been conducted at wintering sites in Scotland and Ireland using a combination of aerial survey and ground counts. The twelfth census, conducted primarily during 16–19 March 2008, surveyed a total of 328 islands and mainland sites along the west and north coasts of Ireland and Scotland. The mainland sites, including the principal wintering haunt of Islay, were counted from the ground by RSPB wardens, SNH staff and volunteers. The more remote sites, especially offshore uninhabited islands necessitated 15 hours of flying. Trying to cover the remote islands by boat would be a much longer and arduous task, especially in March.

Distribution of flocks of Greenland Barnacle Geese in Scotland in March 2008

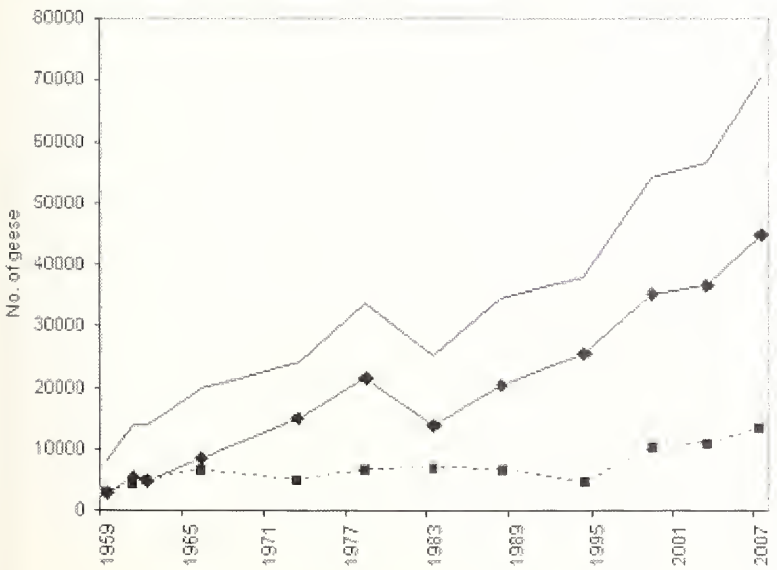


Figure 2. *Census totals for the Greenland population of Barnacle Geese, 1959/60–2007/08 (– Total population, ◆ Islay, - - ■ - - Scotland excluding Islay).*

Table 1. Top ten sites for Greenland Barnacle Geese in Scotland in March 2008.

Site	Count in March 2008
Islay, Argyll	44,961
Tiree, Argyll	3393
South Walls, Orkney	1612
Oronsay, Argyll	1200
Eilean Hoan, North Sutherland	832
Boreray, North Uist	750
Isle of Danna, Argyll	711
Balranald, North Uist	620
Ceann Ear, Monach Isles	470
Paible, North Uist	360

The census was a huge success, partly because we chanced upon a fine weather window wedged between two periods of strong winds and rain. In Ireland, 33 sites were found to hold 12,232 Greenland Barnacle Geese and in Scotland, 38 sites were found to hold 58,269 geese (see map). The total population was thus estimated at 70,501 birds, and represents a 25% increase on the 2003 census total (see graph).

The top ten sites for Greenland Barnacle Geese in Scotland in March 2008 are shown in Table 1. The rate of growth of numbers on Islay has increased again in recent years, with an increase of 23.3% since the previous census in spring 2003, compared to an increase of 3.7% between 1999 and 2003. Likewise, numbers of geese throughout the remainder of Scotland, including other key sites, increased by 22.3%, compared with 7.9% between 1999 and 2003. The 2008 census found 26 sites that exceeded nationally important numbers and nine that exceeded internationally important numbers. However, the number of sites exceeding nationally and internationally important numbers has decreased since 1959.

Several key sites hold the majority of geese and a comparison of the number of occupied sites in each census indicates that this was higher in 2008 than in any previous year. In Scotland, combined numbers at the key sites have undergone a continued high rate of increase, whereas numbers at outlying minor sites have stabilised following an initial increase up to the early 1970s.

The steady growth in numbers of this population will undoubtedly fuel debate concerning the twin responsibilities of meeting Scotland's nature conservation objectives and minimizing the economic loss to farmers.

Carl Mitchell
Carl.Mitchell@wwt.org.uk

NOTES & COMMENT

Nuthatches

Members have lately reported sightings of Nuthatches coming to feeders. Gordon Jamieson had one at Mugdock, Milngavie and Michael Thomas one at his home in Rothesay, Isle of Bute. Recently a regular Nuthatch has appeared at the Rangers' headquarters in Pollok Park, Glasgow, an area of rich mature parkland which would seem an ideal place for the species to breed. Sightings are also reported further up the Clyde valley at Lesmahagow and also at Schotts. *Ed.*

Visitor to a garden at Mugdock *Gordon Jamieson*

Black Grouse on Arran

Arran was once a stronghold for the Black Grouse, with large numbers regularly recorded all over the Island, and even within living memory it was a familiar bird. Historically it had received special protection there. In 1703 in the book "A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland" by M. Martin, it is stated that: "The blackcock is not allowed to be killed here without a permit; the transgressors are liable to a fine." In the nineteenth century this was no longer the case with large numbers being shot. In 1956 J.A. Gibson in his publication "The Birds of the Island of Arran" wrote: "Until relatively recently it was a common breeding species and was well distributed throughout the island." Numbers continued to fall, and the last record was a single female in High Glen Cloy on 18 February 2000.

This decline was happening in almost all of western and central European countries, with Black Grouse numbers starting to fall in the latter half of the 19th century, accelerating over 1970–1990. In the early 1990s it was estimated that about 25,000 males were present in the UK, but in 1995 and 1996 the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the Game Conservancy Trust (GCT) and Forest Enterprise (FE) conducted a ground survey which established a revised estimate of 6,500 males.

The main reasons thought to have contributed to the decline of Black Grouse include: loss of habitat through intensive sheep grazing, agricultural improvements, changes in agricultural practices; overshooting; and increased numbers of predators such as foxes, especially where black grouse numbers are already low.

Several black grouse recovery projects have been initiated in the UK. The Arran Black Grouse Group is one of them. The group feels that the island has the right habitat and there are no foxes. The group is very much a local group with a wide range of representation including: conservationists, estate managers, farmers, foresters, and gamekeepers. This almost unique partnership of local people with the support of Scottish National Heritage and the National Trust for Scotland, is committed to Black Grouse reintroduction.

A breeding programme is being established and is starting later this year when young birds are being brought onto the island. From this initial group, birds will be bred and, once a stock of breeding birds has been established, their chicks will be released. These birds will be monitored and steps will be taken to ensure the success of the project. This will include making sure that the habitat is maintained and where appropriate improved. Throughout the project, viewing sites for observation and educational purposes will be established. Although Black Grouse can still be shot, in season and with the land owner's permission, it is anticipated that none of

Why do they keep lighting up our roosting place every year ?

the owners on Arran will permit them to be hunted - such is the regard in which this species is held.

Hopefully, the end result will be that Arran will be once again a stronghold for the Black Grouse, and this iconic bird will be regularly seen throughout the island.

With the support of the people of Arran, the group feel that this goal can be achieved. If you would like to find out more, including how you could help, contact arranbgg@fwi.co.uk. Financial support is welcome, and you can send a cheque, made payable to the Arran Black Grouse Group, to The Arran Black Grouse Group, Broomhill Croft, North Kiscadale, Whiting Bay, Isle of Arran, KA278RH

James Cassels

(from his article in the Arran Banner)

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the bird picture below and have a chance of winning an SOC item. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 91. Send your single caption by E-mail to jimmy.maxwell@virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC - see Page 3)

Black-headed Gull *Jimmy Maxwell*

The winning Caption from *SBN* 89 (see photo below) came from Peter Holt with "Who's not been using Persil, eh??" Well done. Another runner-up was; "Seen an ugly gosling anywhere?" by Allan Stevenson.

Mute Swans and Greylag Goose *Jimmy Maxwell*

Help required

Can any readers give me biographical details of D.K.Wolfe Murray, who wrote and illustrated bird books as "Fish-Hawk"? He lived from 1897 to 1970 and there is a brief entry about him in Christine Jackson's "Dictionary of Bird Artists of the World". He was a Scot – but from where? Perhaps East Lothian (I found his ownership signature in a book in a North Berwick shop). And he served as a crew member on fishing boats. I sense an interesting character and am curious to know more about him. All best wishes, **Peter Holt**, Egghölzliweg 5 CH-3074 Muri, Switzerland.

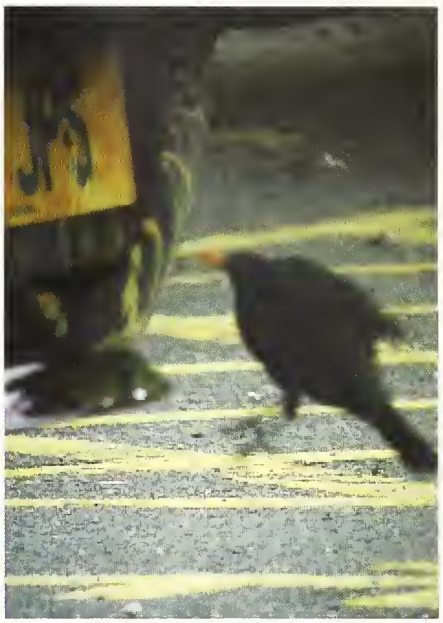
Dipper's reflective behaviour.

On June 20th, a group of us were relaxing in the beer garden of the Flotterstone Inn after a walk in the Pentlands, when we noticed the odd behaviour of a Dipper approximately 4m away from us. Quite oblivious to everyone in the busy garden, the bird was displaying to its reflection in the window of a darkened room. For several minutes it repeatedly strutted towards the window, calling as it did so, going right up to the glass, and then backed off as though trying to impress or perhaps overawe its 'rival'. Judging by the obvious state of the windowsill, this bird's behaviour is not unusual! The nearest water area is the stream, some 8 metres away.

Richard Squires

Blackbird feeding antics

On holiday this year in Cornwall, I observed this Blackbird circling a sports car in our caravan park. Every few seconds it fluttered up and pecked at the metalwork, number plates and wheels. I concluded that it was feeding from dead insects that had impacted with the car body possibly as it reached high speeds. It carried out its inspection and breakfast for around twenty minutes.



Auto feeder *Jimmy Maxwell*

Reflection *R. Squires*

BIRDSPOT:

Autumn 2008 Invasions

Grey Phalarope bonanza: Invasions, blizzards, tsunamis! - terms not normally associated with Grey Phalaropes in Scotland, but this autumn has been exceptional. Unprecedented numbers have graced coastal sites around Scotland, with the lion's share going to Orkney, Skye and the Outer Hebrides. The first hint of things to come was a count by Brian Rabbitts of 22 birds >South during a 5 hour seawatch at Griminish Point, N Uist (Outer Hebrides) - apparently a Scottish record - though a short-lived one!

Grey Phalaropes were soon turning up all over the country - from Ayrshire to Shetland. Prior to this autumn there were only 80 Grey Phalarope records for Orkney. On 27th October Stuart Williams went for a "potter" on Mainland Orkney and found a total of over 110 birds at only seven locations! The biggest concentration was at the "Churchill Barrier No. 2" - a causeway that connects Mainland to Burray. Here up to 61 birds were present in a single flock during the last week of October. At the same time Gedintailor on Skye hosted a flock of 52.

Colin Corse's photos show part of the "No. 2 barrier" flock - a sight that may not be seen again in Scotland for many a long year! The flight shot shows the wing pattern of the birds very well, along with the broad tail. It is not easy to separate Grey Phalaropes from Sanderlings in flight. Both are basically grey and white waders with striking white wing bars. However, the Grey Phalarope's wing bar is more restricted to the "arm", whereas that of the Sanderling extends onto the "hand" (primaries) giving the wing bar a more pronounced "V" shape. The flight jizz of the two species is quite different: Sanderlings have a fast,

Grey Phalaropes in flight *Colin Corse*

direct flight typical of a small wader, whereas that of the Grey Phalarope is rather hesitant, with wings and head held rather high above the body, to my eyes reminiscent of a roding Woodcock. Fly-past phalaropes often give the impression that they are just about to land on the sea - which of course they might be!

Waxwings on the move: Hot on the heels of the phalaropes, late October and early November has seen large numbers of Waxwings arriving throughout the country, with the promise of many more to come. The first arrivals were in the northern and western isles - suggesting that some Waxwings come "over the top" in to

Waxwings in flight *Clive McKay*

Grey Phalaropes *Colin Corse*

Sanderlings in flight *Clive McKay*

Waxwing - Glendale, (S Uist) Nov 5 *John Kemp*

Scotland. John Kemp's picture shows one of a flock of 14 on 5th November, attracted to his garden at South Langass, S Uist (Outer Hebrides) by apples that he had optimistically put in a tree for that very purpose. Being so confiding and striking, there are no problems identifying Waxwings (though remember to check for N American Cedar Waxwings which have pale yellow bellies). However, in flight Waxwings can easily be passed off as Starlings, especially if they are against the light when their paler colouration isn't obvious. The flight photo shows part of a cracking flock of 77 migrants which flew past me on a visible migration watch at Monifieth/Barry Buddon (Angus & Dundee) a few years ago. Though not the best photo in the world, there are enough birds at different angles to give some feel for the flight jizz: the key points to note are the blunt headed appearance, and the "long-handed" or "sharper" winged appearance caused by the Waxwing's long primaries. Starlings appear "fuller winged." What the photo can't show is the characteristic slightly less purposeful and more undulating flight of the Waxwing.

Clive McKay

BOOK REVIEWS

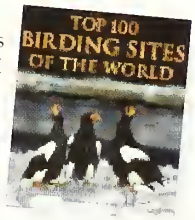
The RSPB Handbook of Garden Wildlife. Peter Holden and Goeffrey Abbot, 2008. ISBN 978-0-7136-8860-3 Helm (A&C Black) Paperback £9.99 240 pages.

The RSPB is re-orienting itself as a wildlife conservation charity and this is reflected in the broadening scope of its literature. The topic of Garden Wildlife has been visited before, in a different guise, in the "Secret Lives" series. This book is a well presented, wide-ranging guide to planning and maintaining a garden to encourage wildlife. Moreover it recognises the wealth of plants to be found in a wildlife- friendly garden, having an illustrated identification guide to some 340 species, but not including ferns. There are chapters on planning a garden for wildlife, the types of habitat that can be created and how to do so. Nor is the DIY enthusiast forgotten, with plans for bird-feeders and insect "hotels" provided amongst others. This book covers a lot of ground in a slim volume (no pun intended) and provides a good starting point for making one's garden more wildlife friendly.

Jean Torrance

Top 100 Birding Sites of the World. Dominic Couzens, 2008. New Holland ISBN 978-1-84773-109-8 Hardback £35.

This is a large-format coffee-table book. The sites are grouped by continent, each site beginning with an information panel comprising a location map, habitat, key species and the best time of year to visit. There follows a description of the site, its birds and any conservation concerns. It is well-illustrated with photographs of the site, habitats and special birds. Two or three pages are allocated to each site.



The "Top 100" of anything is bound to be a personal selection and we could probably all question some of those included and make a case for our own favourites; indeed the author recognises this in the introduction. For example, the two British sites mentioned are North Norfolk (ranked 55) and the Outer Hebrides (ranked 66). If you were to pick one site in Scotland, would it be the Outer Hebrides? However, as a "site" it is pretty extensive, the description covering such "outliers" as St Kilda, North Rona, Sula Sgeir and the Shiants as well as Lewis, Harris and the Uists. Having been fortunate enough to visit some of these more remote islands, I could certainly agree with the author about the superb range of birds to be found there.

Many of the sites are world-famous, for example the Camargue, Eilat, the Seychelles, Galapagos and the Everglades. However, there are many I did not know about, for example the number-one-ranked Spiny Forest in Madagascar and number two, the Tari Valley in Papua New Guinea. Also included at 100 is Liaoning in China, which the author describes as "not good birding country at all"! It is listed because of the wide range of fossil birds found there recently, dating back some 130 million years!

Not many of us could travel to all 100 in our lifetimes, or even necessarily would wish to; however, this book is a tempting glimpse of some of the world's best sites, and offers many possible suggestions for that "trip of a lifetime".

Paul Speak

The Wisdom of Birds, Illustrated History of Ornithology. Tim Birkhead, illustrators various, Bloomsbury 2008, ISBN 1-978-0-7475-9256-3 Hardback Price £25.

This book charts how our knowledge of Birds and Bird Behaviour developed from the theories of the Greeks, through the myths and folklore of the Middle Ages, to the beginnings of scientific understanding. The split between field biology and Systematics in the late 17th C is discussed, as is the development of the experimental investigation of bird behaviour which dispelled the myths surrounding migration, territory, and reproduction.

The author focuses on the work and influence of John Ray who in the 17th Century developed a working definition of a species and described 500 known species. From this he developed a classification system for birds 60 years before Linnaeus.

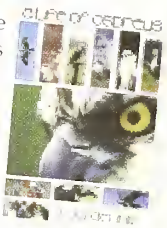
The subjects covered are: *1) A History of Development of Ornithology. 2) From egg to chick* the 400 year long struggle to understand how one copulation can result in laying of more than one fertilised egg over many weeks. *3) Instinct and Intelligence* Preparation for Life. 4) *Emergence of Migration.* 5) *Light and the Breeding Cycle. 6) The Discovery of Territory.* 7) *Birdsong. 8)* Sex. 9) *Infidelity.* 10) *Reproduction and Longevity*

The author expounds on the development of our understanding in each of these areas of birds from myth to the scientific knowledge of the present day. This is a fascinating tale of the difficulties encountered in the advancement of science. As Tim Birkhead tells the story, acquisition of understanding and knowledge can seem to be a game of blind mans bluff, following red herrings and stumbling up blind alleys. Workers were also fighting the prejudices of the established scientists of the day. Though Ray developed both field biology and Systematics and Taxonomy, observing bird behaviour in the field only became accepted as an activity necessary to the advancement of ornithology in the early 20th C. Before this, field studies were denigrated by museum-based scientists working to develop Systematics. This book is very well illustrated with over 100 contemporaneous images which help to illuminate the period discussed. To many scientist ornithologists, much of the work described will be familiar and some may disagree with some statements, but as a scientist trained in the different field Medicine, I found it a fascinating account of the advancement of Ornithology.

Harriet Trevelyan

A Life of Ospreys. Roy Dennis, 2008. Whittles Publishing. ISBN 978-1904445-26-5 Softback, 211 pages, price £18.99.

Alongside the late George Waterston, the leading British authority on Ospreys is without question Roy Dennis. Who better then to write a personal account about this fine raptor. He saw his first Scottish Osprey 48 years ago at Loch Garten when he was invited by George Waterston to be warden under the more senior Dick Fursman. From that year onwards he was well and truly hooked and has dedicated countless hours each year to studying these birds, both here and abroad.



The book tells the story of the Osprey in twelve main chapters covering the early history, recolonisation in Scotland, into England and Wales, breeding and ecology, conservation, migration and world distribution. Roy has enlivened the text by adding nearly one hundred short, hand-written extracts from his personal diaries as well as another one hundred or so of his excellent colour photographs. Add in eleven line drawings and forty-one tables and you have a carefully thought out, very attractive and informative book. I particularly enjoyed reading the chapter on the bird's history within the British Isles, its breeding biology and also recent work on satellite tracking to and from its West African wintering areas. I strongly recommend buying this book, which I consider very good value.

David Clugston

Bird Song: Biological Themes and Variations (Second Edition) C.K.Catchpole and P.J.B.Slater 2008 (First edition 1995) Cambridge University Press ISBN 978-0-521-87242-3 (hardback) 335 pages £40.

If you have ever marvelled at the variety and complexity of bird song, and wondered why birds sing as they do, then this book should appeal to you. Although written primarily for students and researchers in animal behaviour and packed full of information as it is (the authors review over 1000 scientific papers), it is nevertheless targeted partly at amateur ornithologists and is written in an easily comprehensible way. It is the sort of book you don't have to read from cover to cover, but you can look at the long list of contents, choose a topic that looks interesting, and soon find yourself engrossed.

The two authors are both academic professors who have studied acoustic communication in birds for more than 30 years. Clive Catchpole, of London University, has tended to specialise on warbler song, while Peter Slater, of St Andrews University, did most of his early work on Chaffinches. Both have contributed greatly to our knowledge of bird song through systematic observation and carefully designed experiments, and both have impressive publication records on the subject.

Extensively updated from the first (1995) edition, the 274-page text of this book is organised into 9 chapters, entitled: the study of bird song,

production and perception, how song develops, getting the message across, when do birds sing?, recognition and territorial defence, sexual selection and female choice, themes and variations, and variation in time and space. Each chapter is subdivided into up to 8 sections. Chapter 5, for example - when do birds sing? - consists of: introduction, song and the breeding cycle, seasonal song and hormones, females that sing, the dawn chorus, and avoiding competition. For some reason, and frustratingly because I think they help a lot, only 2 of the chapters have a conclusion section.

The main thrust of the book is to propose that the two main functions of bird song are attracting a mate and defending territory. But there is also a wealth of other fascinating information, concerning, for example, song learning, mimicry, and the ways in which song varies within species. There is even a diagram on p.103 showing precisely why the Dipper which sings on the stretch of river at the bottom of our garden does so at a frequency which is high enough to avoid the masking effect of the constant background noise of fast-running water! I recommend it.

John Savory

Grouse: The Natural History of British and Irish Species (The New Naturalist Library) Adam Watson and Robert Moss 2008. Harper Collins, London. 529 pages Hardback, ISBN 978-0-00-715097-7, £50 Paperback, ISBN 978-0-00-715098-4, £30.

As one of the many past students and collaborators who have studied grouse in Scotland with Adam Watson and Robert Moss, and as one who has subsequently followed their work with interest, it gives me special pleasure to commend this, their new authoritative New Naturalist book to you. It tells you just about everything you could want to know about our four species of British (and Irish) grouse - Red Grouse, Ptarmigan, Black Grouse and Capercaillie - and their conspecifics and nearest relatives in other countries. An amazing total of 110 years research between them gives the two authors unrivalled knowledge and understanding of their subject, and they have also made full use of relevant information from other sources. It is a book I have eagerly anticipated for a long time. It is a lengthy but always lucid and engrossing read, with 414 pages of text, 57 pages of endnotes and 45 pages of bibliography. Each of its 15 chapters ends with a helpful summary, and it is well illustrated throughout with superb colour photographs. Brief introductory chapters dealing with the origins of grouse species worldwide and species' names are followed by detailed accounts of the four British species, Red Grouse being combined with the circumpolar Willow Ptarmigan with which it is conspecific. Then there are descriptions of behaviour, snow-roosts, territory and plumage, followed by chapters dealing with habitat (including change since the last ice age), nutrition and enemies (predators, parasites and virus disease). Causes of population fluctuations are examined next - a contentious topic that has been debated for decades - and the final chapter provides a revealing insight into management and conservation issues. Overall, Red Grouse and Ptarmigan receive more attention because they have been studied more intensively than Black Grouse and Capercaillie. This is especially so with the economically important Red Grouse, whose status and future depend very much on the maintenance and appropriate management of extensive areas of heather moorland.

There is so much of real significance to learn from this book, for ornithologists, scientists and land managers alike, that I could not possibly summarise here. The following passage, however, should serve to give you some flavour. "In the much altered British countryside, Red Grouse and Rock Ptarmigan continue to show population cycles where large tracts of unfragmented habitat remain to them. Cyclic declines in Red Grouse and Ptarmigan are natural and should be followed by cyclic increases. This can be inconvenient for managers of grouse-moors, who in principle can prevent a cyclic decline by shooting hard in the increase phase, but cyclic declines are no cause for alarm about the survival of the local population. The habitat remaining to Black Grouse and Capercaillie in Britain is much more patchy and fragmented. This can explain why these two species now show no evidence of population cycles. Indeed, today their habitat is so depleted that both are in danger of extinction." Another important conclusion is that weather, food, predators, parasites and disease can all influence Red Grouse numbers indirectly, via territorial behaviour, social structure (particularly the size of clusters of related cocks), recruitment and movement, as well as directly, via reproduction and mortality.

Apart from such demographic issues, another question which I thought could have received more attention is why it is that mating systems in grouse differ fundamentally between those species (including Red Grouse and Ptarmigan) which are monogamous, defend large territories and have similar sexes, and those (including Black Grouse and Capercaillie) which are promiscuous, males defend small territories on leks and sexes are dimorphic. Even if, as the authors say, there is no generally accepted explanation for this distinction, it is still one of great theoretical interest, one that has been studied in other lekking animals (e.g. Ruff and Uganda Kob), and one that deserved to be covered in greater detail. I would also have liked a distribution map showing the geographical ranges of the main grouse species and I found it tedious having to refer to the extensive numbered endnotes at the end of the book. Most of these are references to published work, but many are crucial supporting statements which could surely have been included in the text. Even putting endnotes at the end of each chapter would have been preferable.

Finally, I was amused to read a recent newspaper article in which the correspondent recounted being told by a Highland farmer that his grandmother used to catch grouse while they were feeding on grain stooks. The correspondent said they would have been Black Grouse, and that Red Grouse do not feed on stooks. Then the latest New Naturalist book, entitled Grouse, landed on my desk. The first photograph I saw was of Red Grouse feeding on stooks, taken by Adam Watson in about 1960!

John Savory

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SC 009859).

www.the-soc.org.uk

Passwords to access members' web pages on the SOC web site: 'yellow' & 'wagtail'